



Arizona Commission on the Arts Southwest Arts Conference 2005

Understanding Participation

Arizona's Partnership with The Wallace Foundation

What do we mean by Participation?

Participation, in this instance, refers to everyone in and around an organization—those people directly involved in the day to day operation: staff, volunteers, administrators, etc.; those people who make important decisions: board members, artistic and executive staff, donors; and those people who your organization serves or provides some value to: your audience, students and artists, whether they value creation, entertainment in a social setting, or are in search of thought-provoking or other special experience.

Why is it important to 'understand participation'?

Ask yourself: do you have everyone you want involved in your organization? Do you attract the audiences you want, or the staff, or the volunteers, or the board members? Do you know how to make their experience the best possible—for them *and* for your organization? If not, do you want to learn ways that can help you engage the people you want? Even if you are attracting the people you want, do you know why these people are participating with you and how you can duplicate that success for the future? Do you have an assumption about your participants that if you knew were true or false, could help you achieve your mission?

How does Understanding Participation do all that?

Understanding Participation is a framework of concepts, ideas, and tools that takes much of the conventional wisdom that arts organizations have learned over the years and combines it with research and practices from the commercial sector and social sciences to tackle questions of participation. However, this framework goes beyond mere numbers and other commercial concerns and helps us look at questions of artistic content and the experience surrounding that content. This framework is not a new way of doing our work, but is a lens that helps us look at our work and see how our decisions impact the goals we have for participation in our organizations.

We can help you in different ways:

- Call us to brainstorm about your participation issue. Our staff can help with initial ideas; we also have consultants and publications we can guide you to, for a one-time exploratory meeting or an in-depth project.
- Visit our website for more information including helpful tools and resources; log on to ACA's website and visit the UP section: www.ArizonaArts.org/up/